536 musical rhythms of these plays are marked by the beat of a foot-long wooden stick, which in North China is called pang-tzu. P'ing-chü, which is also called peng-peng-hsi, is native to T'ang-shan and Juan hsien in Hopei. They are usually love stories both unsophisticated and vulgar. The popularity of pang-tzu and p'ing-chü in Shantung indicates that traditionally Shantung is more closely related to North China than to the southern provinces.

The most popular folk play in East China is Yüeh-chü. Compared with other folk plays, Yüeh-chü is decidedly richer in content and more integrated in form, having a large professional group which is composed exclusively of young girls, and a leisure class, mostly of middle-class housewives, dedicated to its appreciation. The most celebrated Yüeh-chü actress in recent years is Yüan Hsüeh-fen. As the result of her ideological "progressiveness," plays incorporating themes approved by the Communists have been introduced in Yüeh-chü.

2. Ching-hsi. A composite of many regional plays, ching-hsi is popular in all parts of China. The best actors and actresses of ching-hsi, however, have been those associated with the Peking theaters. Shanghai, because of its wealth, has also been able to invite the 536 best actors and actresses to its theaters. The •534 musical accompaniment is carried by the

536 hu-ch'in, a string instrument, assisted by other
534 strings and by wood-winds. Percussion is used to accentuate rhythms of body movements and to dramatize heightened movements.

536 At its present state, ching-hsi is a highly polished form of art. It no longer depends for audience appeal on plotting but rather on a display of skill by the actors. It emphasizes costuming rather than scenery. The verses sung serve to express the feelings of the chief characters. Actors may play the female roles and actresses may play the male roles. The spoken dialogue and the spoken platter, consisting of clichés in colloquial language, help the movement of the play, make the literary language of the sung verses more intelligible to the audience, and aid in the variation of rhythm. However, most of the spectators know the play, have memorized the verses, and can sing some of them. They came to the theatre to watch and enjoy the art of a stylized performance.

In comparison with the folk plays, the ching-hsi is a much more integrated art. Therefore, it is more difficult to introduce innovations in the ching-hsi without damaging its accepted form; in contrast, the folk plays may easily incorporate new elements. This fact accounts for the Communists' effort to revamp the folk plays and to bring them up to the same level of popular and artistic recognition as the ching-hsi. However, in the Communists' effort to